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ABSTRACT

Group discussion on emerging trends in special education and implications for training personnel resulted in policy recommendations on leadership training for teacher educators. The group felt that the education of special educators and general educators, from undergraduate to doctoral levels, has evolved from different origins and proceeded in different directions. It is imperative that the isolation of the two fields from each other be reduced. Suggestions are offered for teacher education and leadership preparation, both in special education and general education. These include: cooperative instruction and responsibility throughout students' programs; screening of applicants to leadership training programs to determine their ability to work cooperatively with related disciplines; and requiring that applicants to leadership training programs have substantial classroom teaching experience. There are several barriers and obstacles to attaining interdisciplinary skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Barriers include the lack of availability of appropriate mentors and role models in higher education and public education; and the length and expense of a preparation program requiring extensive interaction with peers, mentors, and public school personnel. Recommendations for changing the nature of federal funding for leadership training programs are delineated. (JDD)

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Leadership Training for Teacher Educators

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Defining the Issue

Education of special educators and education of general educators has evolved from different origins and proceeded in different directions. Thus, while both are usually (but not always) housed in a single college or professional school, there has traditionally been only minimal overlap between the two fields. Initial training of general educators, typically, includes one segregated course in special education, taught in isolation from the rest of the curriculum and rarely integrated with "regular" methods courses or practica. Initial training for special educators typically follows one of two models: special training in isolation from general educators, with little or no overlap with general education course work or practica, or, using an additive model, superimposing segregated special education training and certification on an initial, equally segregated general education base. The preparation of education leadership personnel in general, and special education in particular, has largely followed this pattern as well. Accordingly, special and general education courses have largely been separate from each other with the possible exception of research methodology and statistics. Thus the "unwritten curriculum" of both teacher preparation and leadership preparation tends to perpetuate the conceptualization of two (or more) distinct types of students, general and special; and two (or more) separate bureaucracies to deal with their respective needs.

Indeed, leadership preparation within special education is becoming increasingly fragmented, with doctoral programs appearing in such areas as transition of severely retarded individuals, research in learning disabilities, policy analysis, administration of vocational education, and technology. Training in these areas is largely divorced from the main body of special education as well as from general education.

The national effort to "infuse" special education into general teacher education programs through the so-called "Deans' Grants" has generally been unsuccessful. While funding was available, some minimal changes occurred, yet disappeared with cessation of federal support. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly important that general and special education preparation approximate one another. Both objective data on mainstreaming successes and dictates of educational law and public policy make it imperative that the isolation of the two fields from each other be reduced.

In the remainder of this paper we will offer suggestions for teacher education and leadership preparation, both in special

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education and general education, to begin the process of implementing this ideal.

Alternative Solutions

One proposed way to bridge the gap between general and special education is to prepare future leaders in both fields to understand and respect the others' world and to work co-operatively in an interdisciplinary program. By interdisciplinary (as opposed to multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary) we mean cooperative instruction and responsibility throughout students' programs, as opposed to segregated courses in several disciplines.

Such an approach assumes that leadership personnel will be role models to individuals being educated as teachers. Leadership professionals' modes of instruction, administration and/or research must reflect not only the content but the value of interdisciplinary cooperation. In this regard, entry criteria for admission to a leadership training program would, in addition to the usual scores and grades include:

* Substantial classroom teaching experience or other appropriate experiences, even for individuals being trained as researchers or policy analysts.

* Interviews designed to determine potential leader's interest in, and ability to work cooperatively with general educators and other related disciplines.

As a part of their training program, these future leaders should:

1. Demonstrate ease and comfort in working cooperatively with colleagues in education.

2. Demonstrate ability to understand and deal with public school policies.

3. Be given the opportunity to work in a Professional Development Center or other exemplary practicum center.

4. Receive training in multiple research paradigms and methodologies, including large and small-N quantitative methods, ethnographic methods, case analysis and historiography.

5. Receive training in the use of applied classroom research methods to solve problems in mainstream classroom (e.g., action research).

6. Have experiences with technologies, including--but not limited to--computer applications.

7. Receive training in multiple instructional techniques for teaching college courses and conducting in-service. Such training should include traditional lecture and seminar approaches, cooperative learning, peer coaching, team teaching, case analysis and other novel educational methods.

8. Take a common core of substantive course work with peers from other educational leadership programs.

Exposure of future special education leaders and general education leaders will potentially create more awareness and sensitivity to both the unique and common needs of these groups.

Obstacles, Barriers and Inhibitors to Implementing Solutions

There are several barriers and obstacles to attaining interdisciplinary skills, knowledge and attitudes. While not insurmountable, they do present difficulties in moving toward the ideal, as stated above.

The first barrier relates to the availability of appropriate higher education and public mentors and role models. The status quo, and the reward system of universities, are largely structured to favor solo performance, both in research and in teaching. It is unlikely that, even in some very prestigious universities, plentiful examples of interdisciplinary instruction and problem solving will be found. And, as the Deans' Grants and other efforts have shown, the institutionalization of change in higher education is very difficult.

Second, a program of preparation such as that described above would be lengthy and expensive. Full time study would be a necessity to achieve the necessary level of interaction with peers, mentors and public school personnel. For many potential leaders, especially those with families or those who are in mid-career, the costs of such an education might be prohibitive. Competition from "cheaper", less intensive part-time doctoral programs could be expected to increase and to be even more appealing, especially to people who will be assuming leadership positions within a school system.

Strategies for Moving Toward the Ideal

Several strategies can be envisioned for moving toward the implementation of ideal leadership training program. These are delineated below as suggestions for OSERS and for the field. Thus, in order to facilitate interdisciplinary preparation, OSERS might change the nature of its funding for leadership training programs in several ways.

First, funding criteria for both teacher education and leadership grants could be altered to reward interdisciplinary education, such as team-taught pro-seminars, inclusion of general

education faculty on decision-making committees, commitment of time by non-special education faculty, affiliation with a Professional Development Center, and a common core of course work and experience.

Second, OSERS' guidelines could be altered to limit the proportion of budgets that could be used to support tenure-line or part-time faculty. Institutions with on-going programs would thus be encouraged to apply primarily for student stipends at realistically high levels, thereby increasing the availability of monies for student training.

Third, a conference series sponsored by OSERS or an appropriate professional organization could be convened. Leaders in general education and special education could be asked to discuss common interests and barriers.

Finally, researchers in special education, especially those concerned with applied classroom research, could be invited to share results with and receive input from special education leaders. Such an interchange would be designed to facilitate more effective resource utilization and evaluation methodology. Coordination between the United States Department of Education Personnel Preparation and Innovation and Development branches might facilitate such an interchange.